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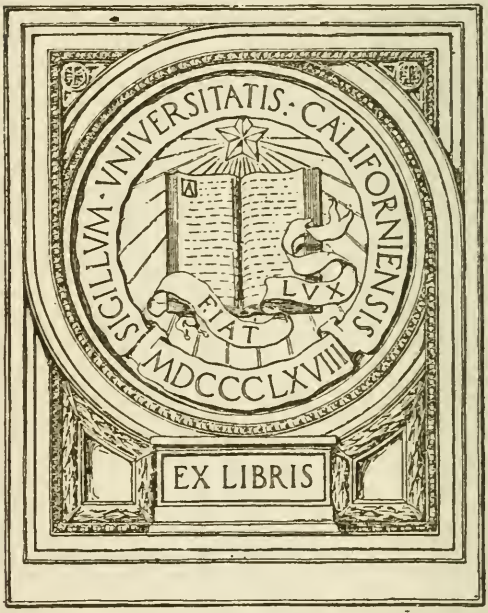

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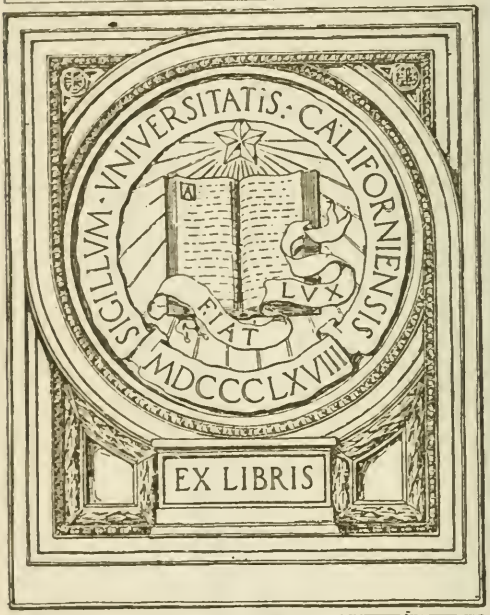

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WRITERS OF THE DAY

General Editor: Bertram Christian

MRS HUMPHRY WARD

By STEPHEN GWYNN

ROBERT EMMETT: A Historical Romance
THE GLADE IN THE FOREST
FAIR HILLS OF IRELAND
CHARLOTTE GRACE O'BRIEN
HOLIDAY IN CONNEMARA
MEMORIALS OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PAINTERS
STORIES FROM IRISH HISTORY

MRS. HUMPHREY WARD.

MRS HUMPHRY WARD

By

STEPHEN GWYNN

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I

INTRODUCTORY

IT would be unfair and uncritical to say that the most remarkable point about Mrs Humphry Ward as a writer is the circulation of her books. What is true, what ought to be said at once, is that without her popular vogue the attention of artists would scarcely have been attracted to her work. Such a success as she has achieved and consolidated does not dictate to critical opinion, but it compels appraisement to be made. Note has to be taken of the fact that Mrs Ward has interested persons of high intellectual distinction, from Mr Gladstone downwards; that she has done so by writings that have no pretension to humour or to wit, writings which, in so far as they are love stories, lack almost entirely the quality of suggesting passion; writings, too, in which the most sympathetic reader must find

many dull pages. It has to be noted, in short, that she has succeeded with all the odds against her. If, as I think, criticism has so far turned aside from the task of estimating her rank, that is because Mrs Ward created her position by a book whose popularity rested on qualities apart from its literary merits. *Robert Elsmere* was considered less as a novel than as the vehicle for popularising a certain range of ideas, and for that reason critical opinion—which is somewhat unduly specialised—refused to consider it seriously either as a novel or as a piece of theological controversy. It neglected to consider how far its unquestioned success was a success of literary art.

I am speaking now of that critical opinion which is responsive and responsible only to the craft itself—which, in fact, very largely reflects the craft's own judgment—and which is always a little prejudiced against the successful artist by certain aspects of popularity. The admiration of those who, admiring Mrs Ward, admired also Miss Corelli, was in this respect a detrimental

asset. Yet, it may be replied, if Mrs Ward can interest fashionable ladies and other not very intellectual people in things of the mind (as undoubtedly she has done), that is matter for praise: unless her methods can be shown to be illegitimate, unless she has vulgarised and mutilated the thing which she delineates, to bring it down to facile comprehension. I do not think such a charge could be sustained for a moment. Highly trained, indefatigably industrious, her work proves her to be—and not only that, but fair in her presentment of those attitudes of mind which are not her own. The devil's advocate before the tribunal of art would be obliged, I think, to limit himself to this indictment: that she is a publicist rather than an artist: or at least that her success was the success of a publicist rather than of an artist, and that even with developing artistic power she has never learnt to subordinate thoroughly the accidental to the essential interests of her craft. It is possible to represent her books as only one or two degrees removed from that

ungenial thing, the "symposium" in a review.

People talk of such and such a person having "had no advantages." Mrs Ward has had too many "advantages"; they stand in her way. There is something of the child in every artist, and it is hard to find in most of Mrs Ward's books. When you find it, she is unconsciously creative—working in a wholly different mood. Every page that she writes of the north country (where we know that she was bred, and if we did not know we could infer it) tells simply of life lived. She is part of what she writes about, is one with it. Everywhere else we are conscious of experience deliberately pursued, of scenes and environments intelligently depicted, but no more. She can describe to us the society in which most of her working life has presumably been passed: she cannot make it live.

Herein she shows inferior to so true yet so pedestrian an artist as Trollope. Trollope made Barchester—made it out of his own consciousness, somehow obscurely informed.

It lives, it is all of a piece, it has an atmosphere which conveys itself: he does not need to describe. Or take a closer parallel. Trollope was probably never in so close touch with politicians as Mrs Ward has been, yet his novels of parliamentary life, far less technical than hers in their method, far less shoppy (if one may be permitted the phrase), nevertheless catch, as hers do not, the spirit of the institution as we know it to-day, despite the passage of nearly two generations and far-reaching change. The difference is that Trollope is interested primarily in men and women, in the rough lump of humanity; Mrs Ward is preoccupied with special types, with their ideas, and their setting, social or historic.

In one sense Mrs Ward has a better right than most novelists to be named with Trollope. Her survival is assured, like his, for the purposes of history. The historian seeking to construct a picture of the last hundred years will find his best resource (far better than the newspapers can afford) in certain novelists, persons of normal mind:

such pre-eminently was Trollope. Take, for example, one of his least known works, *The MacDermots of Ballycloran*: it is like the report of the Devon Commission dramatised and focused upon a particular locality. He saw Ireland with the mind of a jury. And if a Royal Commission had been instituted to report upon the life of the country clergy and the more devout among their well-to-do parishioners, who can doubt but that the evidence and the findings would have left an impression which could be well summed up in the novels of Miss Yonge? These two artists (no candid mind can deny that title to Miss Yonge) presented the mode of middle-class living in their day, in a way that will help the historian—to whom Stevenson or Meredith will be of singularly little service. Mrs Ward also will go down to posterity as the writer who has known how to dramatise in an interesting fashion, not so much the life as the intellectual tendencies of her own generation. The historian will turn to her to understand not what people were like, what they did, what

they did not do, how they judged of conduct, but rather (in an age much marked by speculation) what they thought about. You will gather from Meredith what Meredith loved and laughed at, from Stevenson what Stevenson liked men to do or to be. But Mrs Ward dispassionately, or at least with scrupulous generosity, sets out for us the opinions current in her time upon high matters of general concern.

The competence of her equipment is not to be disputed. Granddaughter to Arnold of Rugby, niece to Matthew Arnold, she was brought up in close touch with ruling powers both in the moral and in the intellectual sphere. She was one of a family in which every individual possessed the power and the inclination to write. Over and above this, her father, Professor T. Arnold, was among the men who felt the Oxford Movement at its strongest. He joined the Church of Rome, and, being a fine critic of literature, went with Newman to help in founding a Catholic University in Ireland. But his mind never reached a final poise on the

questions of faith which preoccupied him. Mrs Ward was reared in an atmosphere of intense spiritual unrest: theological controversy must have been in the air she breathed, and not alone in the air of her home. From 1865 to 1881 her abode was at Oxford. She came there a girl of fourteen, married there at the age of twenty-one, and lived there for nine years as a young married woman. During all this period, Jowett on one side, Liddon upon the other, were at the full tide of their influence. Behind these protagonists there were apparitions from time to time of Pusey on the side of authority, and, on the other, of Mark Pattison, reinforcing the armoury of destructive criticism. Mrs Ward was a keen student of literature and of history at its sources, but the special bent of her mind showed itself in an early application to what she herself calls " the general literature of modern religion," and her first important publication was a translation of Amiel's *Journal Intime*—the self-revelation of a religious soul in difficulties.

From these academic surroundings she removed to London. As the wife of a leader-writer and art critic on a great newspaper, she was in touch with the most prominent intellectual personages of the moment. More than that, in a period of violent political excitement, her uncle, W. E. Forster, was a veritable storm-centre; her cousin, Arnold Forster, was entering, under the Irish Secretary's guidance, on a political career of high promise. In 1888 her own blazing success with *Robert Elsmere* made her a personage: it brought affluence as well. Thus throughout her career, keenly interested in all the vital movements of her time, she has been almost officially at the centre of things. Her contact with politics has been that of a minister or ex-minister; her contact with art, that of a Royal Academician; her contact with literature, that of an Oxford don.

These things do not make a writer, but at least they ensured that if she wrote a novel about politics, or about art, or about theology, she was fully competent, say, to

give University Extension lectures upon the subject with which she dealt. She had not been a parson in trouble about his faith, nor an active politician, nor an artist with his bread to earn; but she knew as much as books could tell her about the distinctive problem of each, and in each case she was personally well acquainted with distinguished living examples of the type she studied. Thus her work, produced at a period when people were strongly disposed to derive part of their culture from the more serious class of fiction, had a high educational value; she was both qualified and predisposed to instruct. Also, and this was essential to her success, she had as much of the true story-teller's gift as sufficed to win and hold her audience.

II

RORERT ELSMERE

A WRITER'S early attempts are often instructive, and Mrs Ward's first novel showed all the superficial characteristics of her manner. To begin with, *Miss Bretherton* had the attribute of associating itself inevitably with an actual personage—in that case a living actress, Miss Mary Anderson. Mrs Ward has always steadily insisted on the right to find in fact a starting-point for fiction, a suggestion which the artist may develop. In another respect the choice of subject was characteristic, since it admitted of being stated as an abstract intellectual formula. The book might have been written in answer to an examination question put somewhat thus: "If an actress of high ambition, but destitute of training, makes a dazzling success by sheer beauty, what is likely to be her

evolution?" And the answer given in Mrs Ward's thesis-novel reveals a third trait destined to mark all her work. Miss Bretherton owes the salvation of her artistic soul to the fact that she has come in touch with persons of what is sometimes called the highest culture. It is an obsession with Mrs Ward that there exists somewhere (at the top) a distinctive society, admission into which may be simply represented as an assay or proof of fitness (it is so in one of her later novels, *Canadian Born*), but is more commonly treated by her as a ripening and perfecting experience. In almost all her later books her characters either belong to this charmed circle or come within its outer ambit—to be attracted or repulsed, according to the measure of their deserts. Her conception of this inner or upper society has no doubt been amplified and glorified since she wrote *Miss Bretherton*; as distinguishing marks of its citizens, knowledge of the world, familiarity with power, have come to receive rather more emphasis than easy converse with the best in books; but, from first to

last there is present to her mind a distinction, if not between the initiated and the uninitiated, at least between those capable and incapable of initiation. The young beauty is changed from a bad actress into a good one by making acquaintance with an Oxford don who writes.

Still, in Mrs Ward's later work the moral effect of this contact is not put so crudely in terms of educational influence as in *Miss Bretherton*. In truth, the interesting thing about this first book is its lack of quality. It showed, one would have said, a deplorable competence—ability to furnish out something that fitted all the orthodox formulæ. A woman so well trained, who could write so well, had seen so many places and people, and yet who could give neither atmosphere nor life, seemed indeed a case to despair of. Yet within two years she had written *Robert Elsmere*, which beyond all doubt has life, and here and there has atmosphere.

Life it has, poignant life, in the central chapters which relate the actual struggle

of Elsmere's choice, whether he shall or shall not renounce his orders. They culminate, when the choice has been made, in the story of slight incidents which render delay unbearable to him, his quest of one man's fortifying sympathy and then—the climax —the avowal to his Puritan dale-bred wife. In that chapter and the next, which describe Catherine's frantic impulse of flight and her dazed penitent return, Mrs Ward reached a point which she has never surpassed, perhaps never again quite reached; and this assuredly is no dispraise. She has not the gift that seems to burn away superfluous words till none is left but the essential utterance; yet passion is there, the struggle, the strain, and out of passion the unspeakable relief in reconciliation achieved. It is the only passion that she knows, the passion of souls perplexed between intellectual or moral faith and the drag of their humanity —a passion singularly austere and unsensuous, with affinities to the landscape which is never far from this writer's mind. What there should be of coldness in those fells

and becks and dales, I cannot tell; but Wordsworth's temper enshrines it, and Mrs Ward is of the same lineage. If she can understand Catherine, the woman of little reading, of convictions so set and limited that they narrow even her heart, it is because Catherine embodies that austere spirit of the fells, Puritanism of the mountains and the glassy Westmoreland streams. Catherine, not Elsmere, is the true centre of the book: she is a life; he is little more than a bundle of ideas, tendencies and attributes. Where he becomes vital, he catches life and significance from her.

That is the atmosphere which I find in this book—the atmosphere of one place, of one person only. Mrs Ward details with love and with knowledge all the charms of southern English landscape—though here, as everywhere, she draws out too long her descriptive passages, and mars even the chapters of which I have spoken with an excessive elaboration of sights and sounds upon the heath where Elsmere paused before his fateful home-coming. If she does not

smother her northern landscapes, it is only because the feeling behind them is too much alive. Much could be spared, no doubt, yet the superfluities, too, have the touch of inspiration. In the early chapters, which depict the life of Whindale, one perceives still the prentice hand. Mrs Ward strives after humour, a grace denied her, and the result is triviality; but how wisely she learnt her lesson! I cannot recall in her later works any effort for a laugh. Her gift was so to impassion herself in following the struggles of a conscience that she could communicate her own interest in an adventure half spiritual, half intellectual. That is where she is an artist. What matters to the artist is Catherine's grip on Robert, Robert's on Catherine—the effort of two souls bound by mortal love to retain close touch of one another when their most vital beliefs run counter. But—there is also the publicist to be reckoned with. The publicist is persistent to expound exactly what Elsmere believed, why he came to believe it, and what expression his belief found in

action. All this appeals to a curiosity, or a faculty, which is not the faculty that art affects. If Mrs Ward had needed to expound Catherine as she expounds her husband, the book could never have lived.

In other words, where Mrs Ward succeeded best, where she was most truly creative, most instinctive, and most an artist, was where she was least a propagandist. The creative gift was there, but not in higher measure than could be matched by half-a-dozen other women novelists of her generation. What distinguished her, what made her unique, what gave her a real importance, was the fact that she made this gift subserve the purposes of an intelligence deliberately bent to the task of moulding and directing contemporary thought. Her novel was in its germ a pamphlet—a pamphlet written in answer to a sermon. Was there ever a more unlikely beginning for a vast popular success? Rare qualities were needed for her task, and the first was a store of true knowledge. But knowledge of itself will not affect feeling, and without feeling

such a success is impossible. Emotion must be raised by emotion; and there was passion in this book—a noble passion for freedom of the mind, a zeal for the rights of knowledge. The history of its genesis, which has been told by herself in the introduction prefixed to the first volume of the "Westmoreland Edition" of her collected novels, deserves to be reproduced.

To use her own words, Mrs Ward, in the first nine years of her married life, "got through a good deal of reading and writing of a rather various kind, concerned now with English, now with French, now with Spanish literature." The modesty of this statement is revealed by the fact that in 1879 Dr Wace, seeking for contributors to the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, applied to this quite young woman for articles dealing with "the West Goths and Spanish Christianity generally up to 800 A.D." This application was suggested by "some articles on Spanish chronicles" already contributed by her to *The Saturday Review*. Of the task to which Dr Wace thus set her, she says:

"The two years of labour among the documents of the early Spanish Church and the West Gothic kingdom, aided at every step by German criticism and research, were the determining years of my life. Practically I have described them and their effect on the mind in *Robert Elsmere*. Elsmere, setting himself to work on the origins of modern France, is confronted with the fact that contemporary record is coloured by the personal bias and training of the recorder, and that this bias and training is a leading part of the circumstances of the time.

"The astonishment awakened in Elsmere, as his task develops, by those strange processes of mind current in the histories of certain periods, processes which are often more interesting and illuminating than the facts which the historians are trying to relate, was in truth my own astonishment. After some fourteen years spent at Oxford in a more or less continuous, though always desultory, study of English poetry, French *belles lettres* and what one may call the general literature of modern religion, the *Acta* of Spanish Councils and the chronicles and hagiography of the West Gothic Kingdom produced in me, beside the immediate

historical result, a kind of far-reaching stir and rumination, if one may so put it, which gradually affected the whole mind. And it was this stir and rumination which, six years later, I endeavoured to reproduce in *Robert Elsmere*."

Another element in her life which reflected itself in the book was the influence of Mark Pattison—who, as she says, "was always interested in the young girl students of Oxford, tried to help them, and set a standard before them." It was an exacting standard of knowledge, of sustained and continuous endeavour—of "Benedictine application," to borrow the phrase used concerning another of these brilliant disciples, Mark Pattison's young wife, afterwards Lady Dilke. To the squire, who represents in Elsmere's history the sapping force of criticism, Mrs Ward has admittedly given Pattison's exterior traits, and has no doubt suggested the character of his intellectual attack. It is curious and not a little ironical to reflect that the effects of the great scholar's long labour, so barren of direct results, may have

been chiefly felt at second hand, transmitted through this casual discipleship, and that this acrid, domineering combatant, in so far as he conquered, may have conquered most through a woman. But this at least emerges as a certainty. Mrs Ward's two years of work, years, as she puts it, "of serious consecutive training, both in writing and thinking," strengthened in her the *esprit de corps* and gave her the sense of belonging to a regiment and the instinct of loyalty to its captains. The emotion which is felt throughout *Robert Elsmere* first found expression as a direct retort to the arraignment of those whom a Bampton Lecturer held responsible for "the present unsettlement in religion." From the University pulpit in St Mary's Church, Dr John Wordsworth, then Fellow and Tutor of Brasenose College, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury, expounded, in 1881, his thesis that "Christ connects unbelief and sin," and specified among the sins to which unbelief was attributable, "indolence, coldness, recklessness, pride and avarice."

"I remember," writes Mrs Ward,

"gazing from the dim pews under the gallery where the Masters' wives sit, at the fine ascetic face of the preacher, with his strong likeness to his great-uncle, the poet of English pantheism, and seeing beside it and around it the forms of those, his colleagues and contemporaries, the patient scholars and thinkers of the Liberal host whom he was in truth, though not perhaps consciously, attacking. My heart burned within me, and it sprang into my mind that the only way to show England what was in truth going on in its midst was to try and express it concretely—in terms of actual life and conduct. Who and what were the persons who had either provoked the present unsettlement of religion, or were suffering under its effects? What was their history? How had their thoughts and doubts come to be, and what was the effect of them on conduct?"

So was born a book whose publication should undoubtedly be marked as an event—though an event in quite another sense than, say, the publication of *Richard*

Feverel. Mrs Ward was perhaps providentially saved from forestalling her effect. In the heat of her offended loyalty she wrote a protesting pamphlet entitled *Unbelief and Sin*, in which she says: "I tried to sketch two types of character, A and B, the one carried by history and criticism into 'unbelief,' the other gradually stifling in himself the instincts and power of the free mind." The Oxford bookseller who printed it omitted to give any printer's name, and within a few hours a High Church opponent detected this fact, and pointed out that the omission made publication an illegal act. The pamphlet was withdrawn, but its writer's imagination did not cease to work on the subject which was "always hovering in the mind."

This long unconscious and half-conscious cerebration has perhaps preceded the birth of most good novels; and it is perfectly compatible with other work. In these years Mrs Ward tried her hand with *Miss Bretherton*, but her translation of Amiel's *Journal* had a closer relation to the larger

theme, for, by her own account, many of Amiel's traits were diligently reproduced in Langham, Elsmere's sceptic friend. It may be noted, however, that Oxford of the eighties was more inclined to see in Langham some reproduction of the Balliol tutor, R. L. Nettleship, a delicate and subtle intelligence, strangely fenced about by shyness. But the captain of the Liberal host to whom Mrs Ward most openly proclaimed her devotion was T. H. Green, Professor of Moral Philosophy, whose published words are actually put into the mouth of Grey, Elsmere's monitor and comforter. Green died in 1882, but his memory was still warmly cherished and the power of his influence still felt, when Mrs Ward began, in 1885, to write her book, placing some of her scenes in the landscape of that "beautiful wild land" about Hindhead in which, from 1882 onwards, her summers had been spent. Not till the end of 1887 was it finished: it appeared at the close of February, 1888, and before April was over had reached a third edition. In May Mr Gladstone, then at the

very zenith of his amazing prestige, reviewed it in *The Nineteenth Century*. The article was a compliment, all the more impressive because it went far beyond the old-world courtesy which was to be expected from the great veteran, when he spoke of a lady and an Arnold. His praise of her literary gift might lend itself to the observation that he commended specially a copiousness in which he himself was over-abundant: but none could dispute the authority with which he commended "the sense of mission, the generous appreciation of what is morally good, impartially exhibited." Here was a noble quality, nobly praised by one who spoke with all the more weight because none more clearly recognised and condemned Mrs Ward's aim, which was, in Mr Gladstone's definition, "to expel the preternatural element from Christianity, to destroy its dogmatic structure, and yet to keep intact the moral and spiritual results." In the long, controversial pages of the review the old Churchman set out to prove the impossibility of this ideal, and he attributed Mrs

Ward's acceptance of the German critical conclusions to an imperfect study of the rebutting case made by such apologists as Westcott.

Later in the year Dr Randall Davidson, then Dean of Windsor, now Archbishop of Canterbury, renewed the attack on Mrs Ward's intellectual preparation. Yet here again the adverse critic paid deferential homage, not to the book's success, but to its high merit, its power of commanding and sustaining interest. To these high disputants, and to the host of her controversial critics, Mrs Ward made answer indirectly. In some very charming pages of the Westmoreland Edition, which recount her conversations held with Mr Gladstone before his review was written, she admits that "feminine courage" quailed before the flashing eye and "deep, thunderous voice" which blew aside the "trumpery objections" of Renan and the Germans: nor did she, in her own person, so to say, stand up to him in print. But *The Nineteenth Century* of January, 1889, contained a "dialogue" by

her entitled *The New Reformation*, in which a chosen spokesman uttered her mind as to Westcott and his fellow-champions. They demanded, she said, that criticism should apply itself in a special manner, with strong prepossessions, under the influence of "affection," to the records of Christianity's beginning. But unfettered modern thought demanded an equal vigilance, an impartial survey, over the whole religious field.

Further than this it would be foreign to our purpose to follow Mrs Ward in controversy; but a word should be said as to the title of this expository dialogue, which she reprinted in her collected edition. "Reformation," in Mrs Ward's sense, as it operated in England, was not a schism from the Church: rather, it transformed the Church in reforming it. Devoted as she is to the English ideal of tradition reconciled with growth, this is evidently to her mind one of the glories of England's history. *Robert Elsmere* is a demand for a new manifestation of the same English spirit: and more than that, she feels herself, in urging it,

to be the heir of her progenitor. " Arnold, the great leader whom the Liberals lost in '42—snatched from life at the height of bodily and spiritual vigour—in the very birth-hour of the New Learning. . . . Arnold was a devoutly orthodox believer, but a Church of free men, coextensive with the nation, gathering into one fold every Englishman, woman and child—that was Arnold's dream." These words, taken from *The Case of Richard Meynell*, a book written by her more than twenty years later, describe the dream which inspired Arnold's granddaughter in writing *Robert Elsmere*, and which has been the ruling principle alike of her Modernist Anglicanism and of her Anglican Imperialism.

III

NOVELS OF THE GENERAL WORLD

ROBERT ELSMERE, Mrs Ward's second book, was published in her thirty-seventh year. It was to be expected that with fully matured talent and experience she would become more of a novelist and less of an expositor. Yet *The History of David Grieve*, the book which followed *Robert Elsmere*, though separated from it by an interval of no less than four years, was scarcely less expository than its predecessor, and was so with less excuse. No dramatic conflict hinges on the question of David Grieve's belief or unbelief: the merits of the story exist in spite of the author's attempt to show what a good man, spiritually minded, and with a brain capable and highly trained, will come to hold as his half-instinctive faith. The merits, however, are there, and they are so characteristic as to require some

analysis, both of them and of the equally characteristic defects.

We start with the somewhat arbitrary assumption of an abnormal marriage. A serious young dalesman, country bred, but seeking fortune in the town, where he develops into a highly skilled artisan, mates with a purely Latin type, the *grisette* from Provence adrift in London. Such a union would, naturally enough, produce a progeny with ill-balanced and inharmonious attributes; and though in the first child, David Grieve, the uncongenial strains blend happily, the Arlésienne's second, and unwelcome, child is a freakish unkindly offspring. The two children, early deserted by their mother and orphaned of their father, come back for their upbringing to the dales, where the care of them falls to their father's brother, Reuben Grieve, and to his hard wife, Hannah. Here we touch life. The two children have wild blood in them, but in the boy it runs to profit: it gives him the touch of imagination which animates his capable boldness. Yet with him Mrs Ward has to describe.

She writes about him; she explains him; she does, on the whole, succeed in making us understand. With the girl she has vision; there is inspiration in that portrait, and from first to last Louie Grieve brings her atmosphere with her whenever she enters on the scene. She is a living force, and the brain that conceived her was to that extent an artist's brain. The truth about Mrs Ward seems to be that she is intermittently an artist. She herself has taken account of the fact, though she does not state it precisely in these terms. In the prefaces to the Westmoreland Edition of her works, which explain the circumstances in which each book came into being, and set down her later critical attitude towards it, she makes repeated allusion to a psychological experience, which is well described in the Preface to *Marcella*:

"Some of the work which, as I look back critically upon it, seems to me of my best—which the public has welcomed most warmly—has been written as it were *intellectually*, following out a logical sequence whether in

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character or event, under a conviction of necessity and truth, but without any overpowering vision. Imagination indeed placed and dressed the different scenes, conceiving them in a clear succession. But all through *one knew how it was done*, and felt that with proper concentration of mind it could be done again. But there are times and crises in imaginative work when this process seems to be quite superseded by another; and afterwards in looking back upon the results a writer will not know how it was done, and will not feel that it could be repeated. Something intervened—a tranced, absorbed state, in which the action of certain normal faculties seemed suspended in order that others might work with exceptional ease,—like tools that elves had sharpened in the night."

Every writer of fiction with the least real gift for his trade recognises the experience of "scenes composed" (I quote now the admirable Preface to *Sir George Tressady*) "with the same imaginative rush, the strange sense of a waking dream, of a thing not invented but merely reported—imposed as by a vision and breathlessly written down."

This is the faculty of invention carried to such a power that the process seems automatic, like that calculating gift which enables certain human beings instantaneously to see the result of long arithmetical combinations. But with the great artists the faculty is continuous and pervades equally the whole creation. With Mrs Ward it is patchy and discontinuous. Her work is at points laborious and imperfect, at others surprisingly vital. Moreover, even where the power of vision operates, the fact that there is real invention does not suffice; the invention must interest and must impress. She herself cites, as one instance in which the mood of possession lasted continuously with her, *The Story of Bessie Costrell*—a tale rather than a novel, the sort of subject which Maupassant might have chosen. Told as Mrs Ward tells it, the thing seems true and real; but it does not interest, it does not hold us. There is a mass of unnecessary detail; Maupassant would have got into ten pages what she spreads over a hundred, and, instead of

wearying us with the commonness of the circumstance, would have made us feel that its very commonness was the essence of the tragedy. A far greater talent than Mrs Ward's is needed to make the commonplace poignant: her invention, when it is most effective, often has a touch of the bizarre, and the picture of Louie Grieve is a case in point.

Still Mrs Ward can create Louie; she can, at moments, make David live; and by this creative gift she induces readers to swallow a deal of controversial stuff which has no artistic value whatever. She harnesses the artist in her to drag the plough of a disputant. It is like providing good church music to drag people in to hear a sermon; and there is no mistake about this, the sermon is what Mrs Ward really cares for. But also there is no mistake that some of the music is first-rate. We have the artistic creation of Louie; we have the picture of Reuben and Hannah. This is a picture of dale folk, of the unloveliest forms of Puritanism, treated with a comprehension that has

in it nothing cruel. Old Reuben, who so ill defended David and David's sister against the tyrannous Hannah, is lovable, and loved, through all his weakness; and even for Hannah herself, the shrew, the oppressor, the defrauder in the name of God, Mrs Ward has at least respect. Hannah is of the dales; her hardness is theirs, a thing needed to make up all that they stand for.

Another gift of Mrs Ward shows itself first in *David Grieve*—her remarkable power of creating mean feminine types. The young lady from a Manchester book-shop who sets her cap at David is excellently seen. But here again Mrs Ward sins against the light. She draws a nature in whom vulgarity is of the very grain; and yet we are asked to believe that because this little person has been taken to a big house, where her husband is welcome, and has been treated by the ladies of the house with an icy rudeness, and has been consoled and taken home by her husband, she then and there purges her soul of vulgar ambitions and settles down, to be a suitable adoring and uninterfering help-

mate. The truth is, and Mrs Ward should have admitted it, Lucy was created to be a nuisance, and a nuisance she would have been, even when she was dying conveniently of cancer.

Marcella is the first of the considerable series of novels whose interest is mainly political—in which the fortunes of characters are bound up with a House of Commons career. Here we are concerned, not with theology, but with social ethics: and there should be noted also an increasing pursuit of vehement dramatic collision, or even of violent incident. The vexed question of game-preserving is one which constantly recurs in these books—raising, as it does, in the acutest form, problems of the rights of property. But in *Marcella* it is more than an abstract question: it provides the central scene of the book.

Moreover, it is a characteristic part of the new environment from which Mrs Ward now begins to draw her inspiration. Her residence—from 1892 onward—has been in Hertfordshire, amongst the Chiltern hangers

and beech-woods; she is surrounded by the rich setting of the home counties; she is fascinated with the old-world beauty of mansions with a long history; and, as she tells us, the neighbourhood in which she settled became almost at once the scene of a tragic affray between poachers and keepers of pheasants. New combinations began to take shape in the chamber of her invention; also, new subjects demanded to be ventilated. Her readers were prepared—as far back as 1894—for Mr Lloyd George's famous budget and for the Unionist housing policy. It cannot be denied that Mrs Ward has been consistently a serviceable publicist. But in considering the artist, to me, at least, it appears that we have in these later books of hers one more illustration of the truth that imagination is thoroughly impregnated only in the early years of life: that the scenes of childhood are stamped there with a unity and completeness of which later and more self-conscious impressions have only the simulacrum. Reuben and Hannah grow, so to speak, out of the ground; they suggest

their setting, they cannot be separated from it. Mrs Ward's peasants of the home counties have not this property: they are people whom she has seen, whom she has visited, whom she has had good will to know; but she has not grown up among them in that comradeship of childhood when distinctions of class are really obliterated. What, indeed, she indicates with most truth is Marcella's inability to pass this invisible barrier. Except in pictures of the dales, there is in her brain an eternal separateness between poor and rich, educated and uneducated. The peasants in her stories are little more than mechanical properties. Hurd murders, his wife weeps, to set in motion Marcella's intellectual and moral processes. Yet, for all that, the faculty of vision still is there, intermittent as always, not always to be counted on, but potent when the spell is felt. Of all unlikely things, Mrs Ward gives us an unforgettable picture of rabbit-netting on a moonlight night at the edge of one of the heavy copses that fringe those open bays of hill-side. It is not

done as a sportsman would have done it, say Charles Kingsley or some other in whom lived that odd mixture of the poacher and naturalist which breeds the taste alike for capture and for observation of wild creatures. But it is done with extraordinary vividness ; the smell, the feel of the wood-side, the sounds and the stillness, all are there.

Also, in the main story, account must be taken of Mrs Ward's power to analyse the attraction of a woman for other women. Marcella's charm, her power to command, to dominate, even when she is disliked, among her own sex, are far better given than her effect on men. It is in this last respect, indeed, that the story fails. One may see the growth of Marcella's passion for Aldous Raeburn: we know nothing at all about his feelings for her. Oddly enough, they are better given in the sequel to this novel, *Sir George Tressady*, which its author depreciates, but which some probably will find better reading than the original book. Marcella is the central figure of both; she is undoubtedly more likeable as a married woman;

and Mrs Ward has conveyed the sense of something rare and noble which is inspired by a union between two strong people who are equal comrades. She conveys also, with delicacy, if without amusement, something of the inconvenience which is inflicted on a politician by a too earnest and enthusiastic wife; indeed, she indicates very plainly her characteristic opinion that a woman ought to be interested in "politics," ought to instruct herself in their problems, ought to be capable of procuring information with which to assist her husband—but had, on the whole, better keep out of direct political intervention. As for the secondary activities, exertion of influence and the like, the more attractive a woman is, the more sympathetic her nature, the likelier she is to bring about some damaging complication—such as even Marcella did not escape from. The situation is planned out with a real knowledge of the world—with a knowledge that has no cynical affectation. Marcella is no doubt an angel, but she is an interfering angel, and when she is drawn to persuade a political

opponent, for her sake, to help her husband, there is a perfectly natural result. Marcella is none the worse, Sir George Tressady is none the worse, but Tressady's wife is in serious danger of being driven to undertake reprehensible reprisals.

Here again Mrs Ward's gift for dealing with mean women stands to her. Lady Tressady is a real addition to the portraiture of contemporary types; for the shrewish little doll is seen with humanity, and we are made to understand, if not sympathise with, the phases of her jealous rage. One scene in this book—that where Marcella comes to apologise to and appease the woman whose husband she has unwittingly made captive—is perhaps the best thing Mrs Ward has done: as a piece of technical mastery in the contrasting of two women's characters it was more difficult to achieve than the central chapters of *Robert Elsmere*. And if the novelist implies that Marcella strained compassion almost to the limit of folly, it is only by way of reminding us that Lady Maxwell's married felicity (too sacred for Letty

Tressady's ears) was of a piece with her fortune and her station in the world. Even here one cavils only at the novelist's implied comment: the dramatic movement of the scene, the truth of what the two women do and say, could hardly be bettered.

Not less good than the picture of Sir George Tressady's wife is that of his mother. The feather-witted ex-beauty, ravaging her son's resources as she had ravaged his father's, is a genuine type. Mrs Ward has the power to present her. What she lacks is the power to do so with that clean, decisive touch which stamps the artist. Everywhere, in any given paragraph, in any given scene, one is conscious of redundancies. The medium in which she works has no charm—she plasters her effects. But she has the gift of characterisation and the gift for constructing a story which upon the whole sustains interest and stands critical examination with a reasonable measure of success.

Her interest in following out the various types of intellectual revolt is not matched by any pursuit of the bewildering problems

which sex presents. Certain conclusions are stated by her, and she is all on the side of orthodoxy. David Grieve becomes the lover of a Parisian art student. If he does not marry her, that is because she accepts only the *union libre*. She leaves him lest her art should suffer, and he has nothing to disturb his soul except a connection not legally sanctioned—for at the time he is intellectually severed from all Christian belief. Yet Mrs Ward makes him aware of a hurt done to his deepest nature: he has a consciousness of sin. On the other hand, in one of her later books, Manisty, a dabbler in religion, is reported to have lived through a couple of passions in his past, but there is no suggestion that they have marked him or affected the quality of his relations to other women. David afterwards makes a marriage which is avowedly accepted as an example of the second best—and a very poor second best; but Mrs Ward, as I have indicated, does not face the facts here. In *Marcella* and in *Tressady* she walks on tiptoe up to a difficulty and then retires. Suppose

Marcella, instead of finding herself preserved for the virtuous Tory, had married the picturesque, deceiving Radical — suppose Wharton had not, at the lucky moment, been found out! No doubt a novelist is not bound to tackle the problems which she adumbrates. But in *Sir George Tressady* the pieces are set. Tressady has married "with less thought than he would have given to the mating of an animal"—and trouble has followed. It is too easy a way out to kill him, melodramatically, in the last chapter. Mrs Ward does not want to discuss what would have happened had he lived. There are plenty of novelists to take up this department of discussion, and we have no cause to complain. But in a writer who is so explicitly the holder of a didactic philosophy it is necessary to mark the limitation.

The subjects which she treats with competent assurance are those proper to the platform and the lecture-room—in the case of these two books, political speculations. Here we have a fancy picture of a Unionist

Government introducing legislation of a socialist and collectivist character: risking its political life for the attempt to regulate drastically the conditions of labour. Considering the book as a prophecy, the foreseen case has delayed to accomplish itself: but as a study of the rival points of view Mrs Ward's pages may well furnish good matter for readers not concerned with these things at first hand. She sees very clearly the perpetual struggle between irreconcilable points of view—that which seeks to maintain individual freedom as the chief good, and that which seeks to regulate citizens by authority of superior and established knowledge; and she perceives shrewdly that the collectivist and authoritarian view has much to commend itself to the instincts of a trained governing class: in a word, that Tory Socialism is a very defensible combination. Yet here her speculative mind is operating in a vacuum. In *Marcella* her theme is better nourished with fact when she portrays the struggle between the theory which justifies landlords' power by pointing to their

prudent and philanthropic use of it, and, on the other hand, those schemes which aim at giving to the rural worker a wider scope and a much enlarged right.

Very wisely, Mrs Ward does not attempt to reach a solution; she sets out with tact the case for an enlightened Toryism; but she makes plain also the uncertainty and disquiet which harass many honourable minds with the question: Why should we have so much when those about us have so little?

Equally characteristic of her is to show lovingly how much they have. She delights in a well-ordered sumptuousness, and probably not a few of her readers take a special pleasure in what she writes with gusto—descriptions of stately abodes, the harmony of carpets and hangings, the evolutions of well-trained domestics, the presence of historic canvases on the wall, the accumulation of choice treasures in a hereditary home, itself a jewel, where generation after generation grows up, subconsciously cultured and perfected by the mellowing influence of all this

distinguished environment. For an age exceedingly possessed by the taste for domestic decoration, a period in which connoisseurship has become a ruling affectation, such passages must have the attraction that Kingsley's excursions into trout-fishing or Lever's account of a fox-hunt have for a mass of readers. Here is a characteristic example:

"He was ushered first into a stately outer drawing-room, filled with old French furniture and fine pictures; then the butler lifted a velvet curtain, pronounced the visitor's name with a voice and emphasis as perfectly trained as the rest of him, and stood aside for George to enter.

"He found himself on the threshold of a charming room looking west, and lit by some last beams of February sun. The pale-green walls were covered with a medley of prints and sketches. A large writing-table, untidily heaped with papers, stood conspicuous on the blue self-coloured carpet, which over a great part of the floor was pleasantly void and bare. Flat earthenware pans, planted with hyacinths and narcissus,

stood here and there, and filled the air with spring scents. Books ran round the lower walls, or lay piled wherever there was a space for them; while about the fire at the further end was gathered a circle of chintz-covered chairs—chairs of all shapes and sizes, meant for talking. The whole impression of the pretty, disorderly place, compared with the stately drawing-room behind it, was one of intimity and freedom; the room made a friend of you as you entered."

Such passages, apart from their artistic value, have an extrinsic interest—the interest, so to say, of a guide-book to the domestic circles of the really great. Mrs Ward undoubtedly knows how people with fifty thousand a year and a great political position do, as a matter of fact, dress and house themselves: even the uninitiated feel that she can be trusted to give a faithful account of what passes in these exalted spheres; and she is quite determined in her purpose of reproducing their splendour. The "best people"—in her sense those who are

privileged to enjoy this way of life—value little less than their illustrious possessions (so she would seem to say) the presence among them of new and real merit. Personal distinction will admit a man, and possibly his dependents, to these charmed regions, and if he is of the elect he will find himself entirely at home there. He will recognise that the stewards of those excellences admit his right to participate; and in that way the hereditary, trained, governing class will have gained by the reception of new blood. That, at least, is how I interpret her philosophy. The splendours are a trust: they are also, in practice, something of a touchstone or criterion: if a man looks all right when put alongside of them, the test is satisfactory. David Grieve, for instance, is accepted, and his wife no less clearly cast out.

It is, in short, part of Mrs Ward's philosophy to set high value on a gathered, accumulated and transmitted culture, on what may be called the culture-producing plant, and she does not see clearly how this is to be obtained without the existence of

privileged persons who shall be its hereditary custodians.

One detects plainly enough the influence of Oxford. There beauty, the costly work of artists, enriched by a myriad associations, is made communally accessible, yet committed to the charge of a selected order, for whom there is provided a decent and even a dignified way of living. Whether she knows it or not, Mrs Ward's conception of the inner governing world of Great Britain is that of another Oxford—another aristocracy placed in surroundings which, of themselves, must impress and mould the mind. She is so much in love with ripe perfection that she cannot contemplate happily any group of people not so provided—with the single exception of her dales' folk. With them she knows the life, she accepts its compensations; she sees it set in beauty, even at its bleakest. Apart from this, she is the novelist of the cultivated rich. An heirloom will attract her, even if it is a neglected heirloom; but the society of decent villa residences is outside her ken. There are, it is true,

certain persons in her books, like the Edward Hallin of *Marcella*, who live penuriously, but they may be considered, for all practical purposes, as hermits, and they are hermits with a free foot in the superior dwellings, whether it be Oxford or in the larger world.

It is true, and should be remembered, that Meredith was equally attracted by splendour, and could never have reconciled his spirit to the environments which W. D. Howells and Arnold Bennett (to pick two writers at a venture) tend to prefer. There are artists for whom the scene must be richly set. It is characteristic of Mrs Ward and of the time in which she writes that she should attach so much ethical importance to the setting —and that in very characteristic cases she should half apologise for the existence of what she emphasises. Marcella and her husband would not feel quite happy about their houses in Brookshire and St James's Square if they did not also keep up an establishment in the Mile End Road, where they spend several days a week quite happily with

only five servants to look after them. The specified detail of their household is so typical as to be worth extracting. There are "two little workhouse girls" (Mrs Ward knows that no trained servant would consent to be employed by a rich peer in such surroundings); a German charwoman to cook, whose nationality answers for it that there shall be no undue research about the dinners; a village boy from Marcella's house in Brookshire to give a friendly, patriarchal touch; and, finally, "the ancient maid who had been Marcella's mother's maid," for personal service. When one knows all this, one really has a clear picture of the establishment; but it is completed by the description of Marcella, on days when her husband had to be away, going out "to meet him at the train in the evening like any small clerk's wife, to help him carry the books and papers with which he was generally laden, along the hot and dingy street, to make him tea from her little spirit-kettle, and then to hear the news of the day in the shade of the little sooty back garden, while the German charwoman

had her way with the dinner." Under these conditions one is quite content to learn that slumming "amused and delighted" the great lady. Only, if Tolstoi had been making a similar study, would he have left his great-hearted woman content to reconcile herself to the existence of slumdom by paying such ransom as this for the great house in Brookshire? But Mrs Ward is too thoroughly Anglican not to be imbued with the spirit of compromise: and that spirit, however excellent in a citizen, makes unsympathetic literature. Even in the sphere of feeling which is most vital with her, the realm of religious emotion, she retains something of this quality. Here, and here only, her characters risk all to gain all; yet the great sacrifices which she sets out for admiration are in a sense made to uphold the right of compromise. Elsmere ruins his position by the claim to accept so much as suits him of a prescribed system. Once, and only once, Mrs Ward has written a novel whose theme was the clash of religious ideals, and has written it without a propagandist

purpose. The theme of that novel was the impossibility of compromise between irreconcilable faiths—and in handling it Mrs Ward reached her highest achievement.

IV

HELBECK OF BANNISDALE AND *ELEANOR*

HELBECK OF BANNISDALE was published in 1898, two years after its predecessor, and ten after *Robert Elsmere*, to which it was the complementary subject. The believing man finds himself at once drawn to and sundered from the unbelieving woman. Yet the collision is reduced to simpler terms. Helbeck, the Roman Catholic, with ages of tradition behind him, loves the girl who simply cannot believe—can find no way to parley with that form of creed which is most averse to compromise, which knows no mean between acceptance and rejection; and the inevitable end arrives.

Already, indeed, in *Sir George Tressady*, Mrs Ward had shown an increased ability to weld her propaganda with her story—to fuse

the background of political speculation with the movement of her characters; and here she betters that example by her tact in the choice of grouping. Her own account of the matter deserves to be quoted at length. In it she tells how the story of an ancient Catholic house in Northern England had touched her imagination with its tale of privations and of slowly advancing beggary endured for the sake of faith. Yet in touching her heart the story had challenged the modern in her mind:

"Such constancy as had been shown in this long series of unknown or persecuted lives thrilled the heart. But what of those forces against which this Catholic family had so stoutly held its own?—the main forces of our English civilisation? What had *they* to say for themselves—the life and thought of Protestantism and the free mind?—as against this silent, age-long defiance to which failure and misfortune had given a spell and a power so pathetic?

"Clearly there was romance, poetry, in this mere juxtaposition. Suppose the contending forces represented, at the present

time, by two human beings—a man and a woman? *There* was the germ of 'truth embodied in a tale'! But how? To make the woman the priestess of the past, while the man stood for modernity and the victorious to-day, would be easy—and conventional. But if the woman were the modern representative of the critical, scientific mind? Evidently she could not be so, argumentatively, intellectually. Under the primeval, universal laws of romance, in such a reading of the situation there would be neither story nor charm. For what is it indeed that conquers in life? What was it that so gripped the mind in the story of this Catholic family? Surely not their strength, but their weakness. If their Catholicism had been a triumphant, well-armed, argumentative Catholicism, like that which excommunicates an Abbé Loisy, to us at least who were discussing their history it would have made no appeal whatever. It was their passivity, so to speak—their lying at the mercy both of the militant, intriguing Catholicism which used and exploited them, and of the militant Protestantism which made them suffer—it was this which touched us.

"Suppose, therefore, in such a story as had begun already to shape itself from the mists, this triumphant weakness, this 'dying to live,' were given to the woman, who yet, as standing for modern civilisation, and the ideas on which it is built, would have in truth the strong and conquering rôle? Suppose to her were assigned the same instinctive loyalty to something greater than herself, which she cannot expound or analyse, but which she *feels*, for which she can die,—as that which made the tragedy and the greatness of the Catholic story? Let her bear in her frail hands the torch of freedom —and let her sink and perish under the weight of it! Let her represent the same dumb clinging, a clinging of the heart—to an idea; place on her lips that same pitiful cry of tortured but inexorable loyalty that has given a terrible beauty to so many Catholic martyrdoms; but let it be in the interest of that order of thought which is opposed to Catholicism in a life-and-death struggle. And let this dumb clinging rob her of life and joy, just as the older fidelity robbed its votaries of life and joy through generations.

"Here, it seemed to me, was a fine subject.

It began at once with heat and violence to clothe itself in detail.

"The day after the conversation I have described I left the North for London. Through the long day in the train the story grew, threw out episodes and ramifications, became hour by hour an organic whole. By the time I arrived at Euston, I knew Helbeck and Laura. His dark head, and darkly handsome features, and behind them, iron will, and the ascetic temper, the lightly moving, elfish Laura, with the silent defiance in her grey eyes; the passion which brought them together, and in the end destroyed them: these were plain to me—the creatures, or elements, of a new and enthralling *puppen theater* of the mind."

So came into existence a novel which it is a pleasure to praise without reserve. Mrs Ward here lays open her method: she plans the thing in terms of spiritual anatomy, and then proceeds to clothe them with flesh; the book, for that reason, has some rigidity of pattern—but the characters come to life. Life there is not only in Helbeck and in Laura—the girl bred in a university town—

but in Laura's dale-folk cousins; above all, in the fanatical Calvinist woman that rules at Browhead Farm. What is more, the invention of the whole is good. Mrs Ward's passion for houses and furniture here lends her an inspiration in the conception of Helbeck dominated by family pride, yet selling away for charity his ancestral chairs and hangings, till there is left only his great Romney—which Laura begs him to spare, and which is finally sacrificed because he will not sell land for heretics to build a church on.

There is a saying in this book, put characteristically into the mouth of a Cambridge professor, that the English universities need a Chair of "the Inner Life." What distinguishes Mrs Ward from many contemporary novelists is her close familiarity with the material, the literature, that such a Chair must handle. When she writes, in *David Grieve*, that after David's spiritual crisis—inspired by a conviction of sin—"the whole atmosphere and temperature of the soul" was changed, she writes a significant

language. Not for nothing has she studied "all those treasures of spiritual experience which Catholicism has secreted for centuries." And she is qualified to interpret, even when she interprets only to deny. Strangely enough, she has never drawn a man so well as in Helbeck—this figure of a natural priest held away from his vocation, racked and torn through his very virtues.

Here, too, is what I find nowhere else in this writer—a true suggestion of passion both in man and woman—passion, with its suddenness and abandonment, all the more violent because it comes almost as a purely spiritual force to natures essentially virginal: the passion in which touch is already possession. In truth, what Mrs Ward has painted is the passion of an ascetic: she does not succeed with the grosser clay of ordinary men.

Beyond these excellences, there is in this book once more, and better seen than elsewhere, the spirit of that northern landscape; it and its beauty and its bleakness pervade every scene; and Laura, who comes back to it as to her cradle, belongs to the picture,

like one of its own daffodils. The fineness of the flower-harbouring grass is hers, and also the sunlit coldness of its rocks and streams. Helbeck, too, belongs to it. Mrs Ward has known well where to place that Puritanism of the Romanist: it belongs to her dales. Not in any other setting can I conceive of her writing in sympathy with an upholder of the fiercest resistance to modern ideas; but Helbeck and his Bannisdale are one: she knows them as ancestral neighbours might.

Her work cannot be better illustrated than by a passage, necessarily prolonged, which gives at once her interpretation of the northern background, of the girl's mood towards her strange lover, and of the instinctive revolt in Laura's mind which defines at once the nature of what in her insists on freedom and the quality of the invading power:

"One afternoon towards the end of Mr Williams's visit, Laura was walking along a high field-path that overlooked the whole

valley of the Flent. Helbeck had gone to meet the Bishop on some urgent business; but the name of his Catholic affairs was legion.

"The weather, after long days of golden mist, of veiled and stealing lights on stream and fell, had turned to rain and tumult. This afternoon, indeed, the rain had made a sullen pause. It had drawn back for an hour or two from the drenched valleys, even from the high peaks that stood violet-black against a space of rainy light. Yet still the sky was full of anger. The clouds, dark and jagged, rushed across the marsh-lands before the north-west wind. And the colour of everything—of the moss, the peaks, the nearer crags and fields—was superbly rich and violent. The soaked woods of the park from which she had just emerged were almost black, and from their heart Laura could hear the river's swollen voice pursuing her as she walked.

"There was something in the afternoon that reminded her of her earliest impressions of Bannisdale and its fell country—of those rainy March winds that were blowing about her when she first alighted at the foot of the old tower.

The association made her tremble and catch her breath. It was not all joy—oh! far from it! The sweet common rapture of common love was not hers. Instinctively she felt something in her own lot akin to the wilder and more tragic aspects of this mountain land, to which she had turned from the beginning with a daughter's yearning.

. . . . . .

"Had the differences between her and Helbeck been differences of opinion, they would have melted like morning dew. But they went far deeper. Helbeck, indeed, was in his full maturity. He had been trained by Jesuit teachers; he had lived and thought; his mind had a framework. Had he ever felt a difficulty, he would have been ready, no doubt, with the answer of the schools. But he was governed by heart and imagination no less than Laura. A serviceable intelligence had been used simply to strengthen the claims of feeling and faith. Such as it was, however, it knew itself. It was at command.

"But Laura!—Laura was the pure product of an environment. She represented forces of intelligence, of analysis, of criticism,

of which in themselves she knew little or nothing, except so far as they affected all her modes of feeling. She felt as she had been born to feel, as she had been trained to feel. But when in this new conflict—a conflict of instincts, of the deepest tendencies of two natures—she tried to lay hold upon the rational life, to help herself by it, and from it, it failed her everywhere. She had no tools, no weapons. The Catholic argument scandalised, exasperated her; but she could not meet it. And the personal prestige and fascination of her lover did but increase with her, as her feeling grew more troubled and excited, and her intellectual defence weaker.

"Meanwhile to the force of temperament there was daily added the force of a number of childish prejudices and dislikes. She had come to Bannisdale prepared to hate all she saw there; and with the one supreme exception, hatred had grown at command. She was a creature of excess; of poignant and indelible impressions. The nuns, with their unintelligible virtues, and their very obvious bigotries and littlenesses; the slyness and absurdities of Father Bowles; the priestly claims of Father Leadham; the

various superstitions and peculiarities of the many priests and religious who had passed through the house since she knew it—alas! she hated them all!—and did not know how she was to help hating them in the future. These Catholic figures were to her so many disagreeable automata, moved by springs she could not possibly conceive, and doing perpetually the most futile and foolish things. She knew, moreover, by a sure instinct, that she had been unwelcome to them from the first moment of her appearance, and that she was now a stumbling-block and a grievance to them all.

"Was she by submission to give these people, so to speak, a right to meddle and dabble in her heart? Was she to be wept over by Sister Angela—to confess her sins to Father Bowles—still worse, to Father Leadham? As she asked herself the question, she shrank in sudden passion from the whole world of ideas concerned—from all those stifling notions of sin, penance, absolution, direction, as they were conventionalised in Catholic practice, and chattered about by stupid and mindless people. In defiance of them, her whole nature stood like a charged weapon, ready to strike.

"For she had been bred in that strong sense of personal dignity which in all ages has been the alternative to the abasements and humiliations of religion. And with that sense of dignity went reserve—the intimate conviction that no feeling which is talked about, which can be observed and handled and measured by other people, is worth a rush. It was what seemed to her the spiritual intrusiveness of Catholicism, its perpetual uncovering of the soul—its disrespect for the secrets of personality—its humiliation of the will—that made it most odious in the eyes of this daughter of a modern world, which finds in the development and ennobling of our human life its most characteristic faith.

"There were many moments indeed in which the whole Catholic system appeared to Laura's strained imagination as one vast *chasse*—an assemblage of hunters and their toils—against which the poor human spirit that was their quarry must somehow protect itself, with every possible wile or violence.

"So that neither submission, nor a mere light tolerance and forgetting, were possible. Other girls, it seemed, married Catholics and made nothing of it—agreed pleasantly to

differ all their lives. Her heart cried out! There could be no likeness between these Catholic husbands and Alan Helbeck.

" In the first days of their engagement she had often said to herself: 'I need have nothing to do with it!' or 'Some things are so lovely!—I will only think of them.' In those hours beside the sea it had been so easy to be tolerant and kind. Helbeck was hers from morning till night. And she, so much younger, so weak and small and ignorant, had seemed to hold his life, with all its unexplored depths and strengths, in her hand.

" And now!——

" She threw herself down on a rock that jutted from the wet grass, and gave herself up to the jealous pain that possessed her.

" A few more days and Mr Williams would be gone. There was some relief in that thought. That strange scene in the drawing-room—deep as all concerned had buried it in oblivious silence—had naturally made his whole visit an offence to her. In her passionate way she felt herself degraded by his very presence in the house. His eyes constantly dropt, especially in her presence

and Augustina's, his evident cold shrinking from the company of women—she thought of them with disgust and anger. For she said to herself that now she understood what they meant.

"Of late she had been constantly busy with the books that stood to the right of Helbeck's table. She could not keep herself away from them, although the signs of tender and familiar use they bore were as thorns in her sore sense. Even his books were better friends to him than she! And especially had she been dipping into those *Lives of the Saints* that Helbeck read habitually day by day; of which he talked to young Williams with a minuteness of knowledge that he scarcely possessed on any other subject—knowledge that appeared in all the details of the chapel painting. And on one occasion, as she turned over the small, worn volumes of his Alban Butler, she had come upon a certain passage in the life of St Charles Borromeo:

"'Out of a most scrupulous love of purity . . . neither would he speak to any woman, not even to his pious aunt, or sisters, or any nun, but in sight of at least two persons, and in as few words as possible.'

"The girl flung it down. Surrounded as she often was by priests—affronted by those downcast eyes of the scholastic—the passage came upon her as an insult."

If one places *Helbeck* at the head of Mrs Ward's achievements, it must be allowed that *Eleanor*, which followed it (again, at an interval of two years), is equal to it in technical accomplishment, in completeness of design, and in the quality which most matters—sympathetic interpretation of the human heart. It is inferior, for reasons inseparable from the subject chosen. The design, though equally complete, is far less happy. Both books have their origin in that "far-reaching stir and rumination" whose first output was the Oxford pamphlet. In both the emotions of man and woman in their sex-relation are connected with the play and counterplay of forces at work in the religious world. But in *Helbeck* the connection is direct and causal: Helbeck and Laura's love comes to inevitable ruin because in him the devotion to religious authority is no less

instinctive than her allegiance to freedom of the mind. In *Eleanor* the central male figure, Manisty, is a student of religious phenomena; he is the upholder of religious authority, not for the sake of religion, but of authority; because he sees it bound up with tradition, indispensable to civilised society. Essentially he is irreligious; and Eleanor is associated with him in his work, not for the sake of the work, but for the association. The story would have stood almost as well if Manisty had been writing directly and primarily on politics—for instance, on the principle of nationality. But at the close religion enters directly as an element: it provides the solution. Casually, through her association with Manisty, Eleanor has been brought into touch with the Modernist priest, Father Benecke: when she and her unwilling rival, Lucy, fly to concealment, they find themselves sharing the retreat of the unfrocked priest; and it is to the martyr of freedom that Eleanor is drawn by the instinct for confession: it is he who points to her the

Christian solution—the way of renunciation. All this is well combined, ingenious and picturesque; it is only to be regretted that Mrs Ward should have marred the dignity of her invention when she makes Father Benecke vitiate the spirit of the confessional by interfering so as to bring Manisty on the scene. Yet at best the plot is a grouping of accidents. In *Helbeck* the whole situation has a commanding simplicity though the inevitable end is reached by subtle complications of the path.

It is a minor matter that Mrs Ward throughout holds our sympathy for Helbeck and never for an instant secures it for Manisty. This means that the book is necessarily less likeable: it need not for that be less deserving praise. But what is vitally important is the relation of its characters to their background. The whole scene passes in Italy: it deals with the adventures almost of tourists—privileged, highly educated tourists who know Italian and Italians, but folk for whom Italian life of to-day, Italy of to-day, with its vines and

olives overgrowing the ruins of Rome, make up a spectacle. In *Helbeck*, setting and actor are one: the scene has value only in relation to the actors. In *Eleanor* there is a tendency to describe for the sake of description which Mrs Ward does not wholly resist. The story of David Grieve's experiences in France had too much suggestion of the enlightened guide-book; here, in a less degree, but still perceptible, there is the same suggestion. A writer like Prosper Mérimée—or even, in his best work, the late Mr Marion Crawford—describes, as it were, accidentally. Mrs Ward makes you feel the scene through the eyes of people standing apart from it, admiring its beauty and its strangeness. Not so does she describe Whindale, or Bannisdale, or any other fell or scaur.

Those who wish to read a description of Italy as it strikes an extremely cultivated, even learned, Englishwoman, with a keen sense for beauty, will read *Eleanor* with interest: so will those who desire well-considered views on the relations of Church and State in Italy set out in an agreeable

dramatic form. But these things are too detachable from the main and real subject, which is a very powerful and subtle study of jealousy in its least dishonouring form, and uncomplicated by the marital sense of ownership.

Eleanor is the woman of thirty, with a disastrous marriage behind her, exquisitely cultivated, full of grace and charm, socially well placed—but hungry with the need for personal devotion. She finds life flowering afresh, her shattered nerves growing into a harmony, because the chance has offered of helping her kinsman, Manisty, in the epoch-making book which he has left politics to write. This brilliant person is admittedly an unmitigated egoist; but Mrs Ward, after her fashion, conveys the effect of his brilliancy by dexterous description. Just as in *Robert Elsmere* we had much about the old Squire's destructive talk and his biting epigrams, but were not given the epigrams to look at, so here also Mrs Ward tells us how Manisty talked; she does not make him say his best things. It is a defect in

her method, and we have to take Manisty, like the Squire, on faith; but what she renders, and inimitably, is the quality of Eleanor's feeling for Manisty—that mixture of pride and protecting tenderness which a delightful woman will sometimes display towards an unbearable man. It is largely for his sake—to propitiate his ill-humour—that she lays herself out to make a crude American girl attractive when the household is saddled with this, to Manisty, most undesired visitor. It might be said that Mrs Ward conveys more successfully Lucy's crudeness than Lucy's beauty; but this, at any rate, is clear, that without Eleanor's good-natured intervention, Lucy would never have become tolerable to Manisty. Eleanor is the architect of her own ruin. Once, however, we have got to the point where the elder woman perceives what is happening, criticism has no more to say; all the painting is excellent. Mrs Ward does not spare Eleanor; she shows her in the pettiness, the humiliation, of her passion; and she gives very fine relief to the girl's

response when appeal is made to her by the vanquished. Lucy's anger with Manisty for his ingratitude, even when she can scarcely suppress the exultation of her own heart, is a subtle and true study. Let us hope that in the long run, like a true daughter of America, she made him black her boots. As for Eleanor, it was her nature to do things for other people; she transgressed it in desiring and striving to hold something for herself; and she fulfils the law of her being by bringing the other two together, and then dying quietly and unobtrusively in a delicate atmosphere of refined peace. But Mrs Ward's sense of poetic justice guides her rightly in making the nice young attaché propose to marry Eleanor when Death had already set his mark on her. She deserved that supreme compliment, and it re-establishes the balance of the design.

V

NOVELS WITH A HISTORICAL BASIS

AFTER she had written *Eleanor*, Mrs Ward let the religious theme alone for ten full years. The next three novels have the common characteristic of being based upon some well-known piece of social or political history. All who had read Sainte Beuve's study of Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse must have recognised the genesis of the central incident in *Lady Rose's Daughter*. What Julie de l'Espinasse was to Madame du Deffand, Julie le Breton (the choice of name is in itself an acknowledgment) was to Lady Henry; and just as Madame du Deffand, "counting every visitor to her salon as so much private property," descended one afternoon prematurely to find her most valued circle "gathered surreptitiously round the lady who passed as her paid companion, and was

in truth the illegitimate half-sister of her brother's wife," so the autocrat of Bruton Street, roused by indiscreet voices, appeared —a formidable spectre—at the door of a room where Julie le Breton was entertaining the personages who had called to inquire after Lady Henry's health. These personages are characterised in a manner which would naturally suggest to the London world sketches of well-known folk. All this part of the book—the description of Lady Henry's salon, of Julie's personality, of her friends, of the relations between her and her employer—is brilliantly done; but after the rupture, when Julie sets up house for herself and the interest shifts to her tragic love story and eventual decline into a duchess-ship, the whole thing lags and flags. Mrs Ward herself says the end should have been tragedy, and she is right. Lady Henry's brief reappearance at the end makes us feel how pasteboard are the other figures; that grim potentate brings life whenever she enters, and the breath of battle.

The Marriage of William Ashe also

"took the outlines of another story, or rather the situation from which it sprang, and invoked, so to speak, a set of modern players, to play it out again, in modern fashion and under contemporary conditions." But this time the story was by far better known, for it was a part of Byron's career, and, to that extent, Mrs Ward had greater difficulties to contend with. None the less she succeeded very much better. Lady Kitty, who modernises the part of Lady Caroline Lamb, is really created; she has "the lightness, the fantasy," which her author sought to convey. This elfish creature, so small, yet so violent, with an uncanny, insane passion of will—"made up on wires," as an enemy describes her—has none the less a dazzling magic, of youth and of something more—a double dose of life. Geoffrey Cliffe, who is cast for the part of Byron, has Byron's meanness, but very little of his stormy grandeur: but to remake a Byron, a Bismarck, a Shelley, a Napoleon, is an achievement past praying for. As well put Othello or Falstaff into the pages of a

modern book: these creations were stamped once and for all on the common consciousness. Mrs Ward, to do her justice, has seen this. She allots to her Cliffe a secondary rôle: the strength of her design is given to representing Lady Caroline's husband, Lord Melbourne, in his youth. Here again she has succeeded beyond her usual measure. The William Lamb of reality has well inspired her study of the English aristocrat, good-humoured, indifferent, yet born to power and attracted by power—and at the same time possessing enough originality to win and be won by the bewitching goddess whose apparition at a great ball is among the things which Mrs Ward has really made us see. Lady Kitty's tempestuous preparations for the robing of herself as an eighteenth-century Diana and her final triumph in that guise leave a sharp outline on memory.

Incidentally Mrs Ward has chosen to sketch, with some definiteness, a social phase of the nineties: she fixes it to a date by a thumb-nail sketch of Mr Gladstone in old

age. Thus her book is a *roman* more or less *à clef* in relation to contemporary life as well as to past history, though without any trace of the indiscretion which beset her heroine, and the heroine's original.

It is a defect in Mrs Ward's story that she makes Lady Kitty's final plunge or transgression the result of an arbitrary and external happening. When she is on her way to rejoin her husband, Cliffe is guided to pursue her; but for the treachery of an angry woman, Lady Kitty, we are asked to believe, would never have gone beyond indiscretion. This is a touch of melodrama and of bad invention; but so little reliance is placed on it that the defect does not really signify. In the next book a similar introduction of mechanical plots ruins the value of the whole work, for the whole story hinges on it. *Fenwick's Career* is suggested by the case of George Romney, who left his wife to come to London and seek his fortune, but never returned to her or brought her to him, and fell in love, as the story goes, with the most beautiful of his sitters, Lady Hamilton.

This theme Mrs Ward waters down. Fenwick comes up, and is led to conceal his marriage to the extent of not avowing it. His wife learns this, is jealous, comes to London, finds the studio empty—because Fenwick, having just sold his first important picture, has gone out to make purchases which shall compensate her for her waiting. Conspicuous on the easel is a portrait of the sitter whom already Phœbe Fenwick has come to suspect as her supplanter. She destroys the canvas, leaves an angry letter and her wedding-ring, and vanishes out of Fenwick's life. Things, after all, do not happen like that; the plot is incredible. Indeed, the novel does not at any part show Mrs Ward to advantage, though it displays her familiarity with the world of painters and their patrons, with the talk of artists and of critics, and instructs her readers in the general artistic movements and tendencies which have made themselves felt since Millais and Burne-Jones grew old-fashioned, and even Whistler a trifle out of date. There is also much description of Versailles, careful

but somewhat redundant. The truth is that a story about artists or about literary people is seldom fully alive: it becomes infected with an atmosphere of technicalities, which lacks interest for the general reader, and to the expert appeals rather as a discussion of ideas than as a presentment of life.

These objections do not apply to the use of a political background for the warp on which to weave the pattern of a story. Politics are less technical, less esoteric; they are, in a sense, everybody's business; and though they most certainly have their "shop," novelists have, as a rule, contrived sufficiently to avoid it. In the book which followed *Fenwick's Career* Mrs Ward drew with excellent result on this field of interest. *Diana Mallory* is certainly not a great novel, but it is a very good one. The story is original and well planned, and several of the personages are really alive. Moreover, though a novel of political life, it is without the propagandist note; it uses a politician's career simply as the material

for an artist. Of course views and opinions are felt behind the telling, but they are not obtruded. Oliver Markham is a young and rising Member of Parliament on the Radical side; he commands great wealth, because his father's huge fortune has been left entirely to his mother, and Lady Lucy Markham does everything she can to advance his son's fortunes and to forward his ideas. Consequently, when Markham falls in love with Diana, the beautiful girl who had taken an old place near his own, all goes well. Diana, it is true, is a natural-born Tory and Imperialist. She has been brought up entirely abroad by her father, a traveller and a student, with the cult of empire strong in him; and knowing England only at a distance, she adores it the more. But the very encounter in which she contends brilliantly against the trained and able parliamentarian reveals to each the other's charm; and Lady Lucy Markham, though she is a Liberal by tradition, and also by affection, because Ferrier, one of the Liberal leaders, has made her his Egeria, sees no reason not to welcome

her son's choice. But on the very day of Markham's declaration the ominous mystery of Diana's parentage, which has been skilfully suggested, suddenly breaks. She is the child of a woman who was sentenced to death for murder, with fraud thrown in—the tragic heroine and victim in a case which had resounded over Europe and America. Upon this announcement Markham is a little dashed; he perceives that such a marriage has danger for a political career; but he determines to hold fast, and is backed strenuously by one of his friends, the great lawyer who defended the accused woman, and never departed from his belief that she had been guilty of no more than a gambler's madness and a chance blow struck in self-defence. Mrs Ward, it is to be seen, does not go to all lengths in her scheme; the charming girl is not the child of a hateful criminal; and, after all, this is common sense, because hateful criminals do not have charming children. In short, the circumstances are such that Markham could have stuck to his choice without political disadvantage, perhaps

gained even the prestige of a chivalrous adventure. But he has more to face. Lady Lucy will have none of the marriage; she has the power to deprive him absolutely of money, and she declares her intention to do so—in the name of Christianity and respectability and the purity of the home. Very deep in Mrs Ward's heart lies the conviction that women are not to be trusted with power; that they will take no account of other people in their use of it; that it spoils them for their proper uses. Here the conviction is only suggested; elsewhere, as shall be seen, it is heavily underlined. At all events, Markham, unable to face the sacrifice of thirty thousand a year and probable retirement from Parliament, allows Diana to release him. Politically, the manœuvre does not pay; public sympathy goes to Diana; and Markham, going from one meanness to another, commits an act of treachery to Ferrier, his friend and political chief, which completes his own overthrow. All the construction of this intrigue is thoroughly well planned, the sequence

from action to action is clear, yet not obvious; and finally Nemesis overtakes the intriguer in the appropriate form of an electioneering missile which damages his spine. Diana is then allowed to come to the rescue, morally and physically, of the disgraced and defeated man who still sums up for her all that she wants of the world.

Diana is really admirable. She has spirit, fire, breeding and dignity; she has something of the airy grace which Mrs Ward contrives to give to such different personages as Eleanor and Lady Kitty; and here the novelist has managed to convey to the full a suggestion of beauty, and of a girl very passionately in love. Where she has failed absolutely—and the failure is characteristic—is the picture set against Diana, that of Alicia Drake, Markham's cousin, who catches him on the rebound from Diana, and drops him again when he is damaged. Alicia is meant to be the unscrupulous woman who makes an appeal to sense; but she is merely a lay figure. On the other hand, Fanny Merton, Diana's vulgar and disgusting little

cousin, the mean agent of Fate who brings Diana face to face with her own history, is vividly drawn, though this is no great achievement. But Mrs Ward has attempted something very difficult in her study of Ferrier, the famous politician, and of his friend, Sir James Chide, the great advocate. In both these cases notable figures in real life suggest themselves for comparison, and Mrs Ward has gone out of her way to indicate that in drawing the lawyer she had Lord Russell of Killowen in her mind. This may have been simply as a way of pointing memory to the celebrated Maybrick case, for Sir James Chide bears no resemblance to the Irish lawyer who was so long the terror and the glory of the Bar. Both Chide and Ferrier have dignity and weight of personality. Over and above these should be noted an excellent figure, the sharp-tongued old Lady Niton, who is seen in the light of laughter, and whose conversation, as given in the book, is for once not unequal to the description of its effects.

Here again, it should also be observed, we

find Mrs Ward's characteristic feeling for houses as an external expression of personality. The charm which Beechcote has for Diana, and the charm she imparts to it—the effect of Markham's house and the bad taste it expresses—these are meant to be felt, and indeed are felt, throughout the whole story almost as living human influences.

Houses and furnishing also play a great part in the next novel, *Daphne*, which is, in truth, not a novel at all, but a pamphlet—a strident pamphlet against the institution of divorce, at least as it obtains in America. Here for once Mrs Ward loses her judicial temper; she gives the opposition no sort of fair play; and it cannot be said that the book has in any sense much value. But it is worth while to emphasise once again Mrs Ward's sense of the danger which power brings to women. Daphne, the millionaire in her own right, feels that she has a special claim against her impecunious husband; and, Mrs Ward suggests, American law adds to the dangers of power by the facility which it gives for money to have its own way.

In her Preface to the Westmoreland Edition of this book Mrs Ward apologises to Americans for a novel written after a visit to their country, and expressing on the whole a condemnation—in spite of the chapters which celebrate Washington and the hero who gave the capital his name. She appeals to the portrait of Lucy Foster in *Eleanor* for a true presentment of her feeling to the kindred race in the New World. Yet what she admires in Lucy is precisely the old-world America—old-world even in its independence. Daphne is the American Europeanised, a figure much more up to date than Lucy. One has to turn to another book for Mrs Ward's recognition of the glory of newness, the vast unbroken forces which America's continent is throwing into the balance of our modern world; and it is not with the United States that she associates her picture of them, but with Canada.

Yet *Canadian Born*, published in 1910, cannot be numbered amongst her successes. Mrs Ward having made a tour through Canada—as a traveller with rather too many

facilities and advantages—grouped her impressions of travel about a loose thread of story: it was a fashion of writing that the late William Black used with unfailing charm. But in Mrs Ward's book, through all the keen pleasure and interest in what she has seen, one detects the voice of the publicist formulating views. A little thing would change many of the scenes, many of the dialogues, into excellent leading articles.

VI

THE CASE OF RICHARD MEYNELL

MRS WARD'S dramatic tracts on divorce, even her excursions into the field of Imperial politics, are, in a certain sense, superficial: they bring us into touch only with the surface of the writer's mind. In *The Case of Richard Meynell* she returned to that deeper prepossession which has never left her since it inspired her first achievement. It has been seen how *Robert Elsmere* owed its birth to a movement of revolt—revolt against a Bampton Lecture!—and how that revolt sought its utterance in a pamphlet, and how years later the pamphlet ripened into a novel, which put the thesis of the pamphlet as a concrete human case. If Robert Elsmere disbelieved, was it only (as the Bampton lecturer would suggest) through spiritual pride or some other unchristian

quality? That is the question which the book was written to answer. But beside it ran the other question: Are the things which Elsmere cannot believe things essential to Christianity? Now, after twenty years, Mrs Ward returns to these problems, and it is apparent that in her view the first question no longer needs to be put. No one, she would say, disputes that persons in the Christian community living good and even exemplary lives hold views as difficult to reconcile with the letter of the Creed as are the tenets of an extreme ritualist with the Thirty-Nine Articles. Her question now frames itself rather in this form: Has the Christian a right to assert views which involve wide modification of Christianity's intellectual framework? Obviously this is an inquiry by far more polemical. In *Robert Elsmere* her task was simply to show that a good man might in all honour and sincerity, and against every pull of his nature, feel himself driven to conclusions at variance with those of his Church. The problem raised by *Richard Meynell* is less

human: and in answering her question Mrs Ward must assume the rôle of a prophetess, picturing in advance not a secession but a struggle within the Church of England.

That forecast will interest all who care for such matters; but as a novel the book suffers by lack of any contest within the hero's mind: there is no essential drama. Mrs Ward tries to meet this lack by inventing a plot, to me wholly incredible, which forces upon Meynell a certain choice arising out of extraneous happenings. The struggle in Elsmere's case is inevitable, inseparable from his position; but because a novel ought to have a plot, Meynell is grouped with a set of people each and all of whom have acted with criminal folly, and so force him to decide between his private honour and his public mission. Yet all this is, in reality, padding. What Mrs Ward has wanted to do in writing the book has been to project herself into an imaginary contest of Modernist Anglicans against Anglican orthodoxy; to invent the situations that might arise, the

weapons that might be used, and above all the sermons that might be preached.

In *Robert Elsmere* Robert's true antagonist is Catherine; in Helbeck the opposition between Laura and her lover makes the whole theme; but Meynell's fortunes and sympathies link him with Elsmere's daughter, and she instinctively takes his side. His real opponent is the saintly old bishop who rejoices manfully when the arbitrary accident of a scandal is cleared out of the way and a clean fight is open. In other words, the plot of this book concerns Meynell's life and belief only by chance: in the other two novels Helbeck and Elsmere are carried inevitably forward to dramatic conflict by the facts of their own faith.

All this is not to underrate the value which the book may have as eloquent, learned and feeling exposition of matters which deeply concern many serious minds. But in this case the form of the novel is used as a vehicle for exposition; in the other two, exposition in some measure was exposition of the plot itself. Speaking critically, *Richard Meynell*

adds nothing to Mrs Ward's literary reputation. From a more general point of view, the book may be taken to indicate her conviction that *Robert Elsmere* has borne fruit: that the controversy and the propaganda, which it helped notably to bring home to many minds, have resulted in a great advance towards the conclusion which she desires; and that those who, like herself, crave for a Church which shall satisfy their instinct for tradition, for beauty, and for mystery, without repelling their intellectual convictions, are justified in hoping for a realisation of their desire. It does not consist with the purpose of this critical study to examine into these opinions. Note should simply be taken of the fact that Mrs Ward's hope rests to-day in what is passing not so much within the Church of England as in a wider sphere, in the Modernist movement pervading a Catholicism which may become more catholic in ceasing to be Roman.

VII

LATER NOVELS AND GENERAL APPRECIATION

THE Case of Richard Meynell was the last volume in the collected edition of Mrs Ward's works: but since then she has added considerably to her output. Not much importance need be attached to her *Mating of Lydia*, a novel hinging on the character (for which rumour suggests an original) of an old and infamous landlord who shuts himself up with hoards of choice treasure, masterpieces of many arts. The subject lends itself to the erudition of Mrs Ward's connoisseurship: yet the result is a somewhat melodramatic and mediocre story, lit up at points by that odd quality of intermittent vision which has been already noted. The opening chapters that describe Melrose's appearance at his bleak northern home with his scared and

bullied little Italian wife are vivid enough; then the book flags, dealing with vaguely indicated persons, whose actions are described in a manner to suggest certain problems and difficulties—when suddenly into the middle of them walks an astonishing creature with a distinct life of her own, who might have dropped from the clouds, but who evidently and unmistakably is there and is alive. This is the miserly old tyrant's daughter, the cross-bred Italian girl, reared in poverty by strange shifts, big-eyed, helpless and pathetic as a hurt animal, and using her helplessness as a weapon with formidable tenacity. Undoubtedly some elf presented Mrs Ward with that vision; she is the product of a genuine creative power not yet spent—the same power which in its earlier vigour created David Grieve's sister.

If, however, there were any question as to the durability of Mrs Ward's gift, her next story would have settled it. *The Coryston Family* is a telling study of contemporary England in those phases of it which specially interest her—concerned with the classes in

which power resides—that is to say, the rich, hereditary landlords who have the taste for government, and the picked politicians who have forced their way into the privileged ring. Briefly, the work is a study in honest tyranny, and a study the more interesting because it is not dominated by any thesis—except in so far as it reinforces the opinion that women ought not to have control over men. Lady Coryston, like Lady Lucy Markham in *Diana Mallory*, has been left with plenary powers over great revenues; but, unlike Lady Lucy, she has views of her own to advance. Her husband has been rather her mouthpiece than a politician in his own right, and she has now trained her favourite son and got him into Parliament at a moment when political divisions have come almost to the pitch of civil strife—in short, in the England of 1913. The story opens with a sketch of Lady Coryston in the Speaker's Gallery awaiting her son's maiden speech; and the atmosphere of that queer, dim, railed-off side-chapel to St Stephen's (opening on it as if by a kind of leper's

" squint ") is cleverly rendered. But this is only a prelude to the brilliant scene which indicates the *nodus* of the story. Lady Coryston's eldest son, the holder of the title, has launched himself into the controversies of the moment on the extreme Socialist wing. She has summoned her children—three sons and one daughter—for a family council: and the council meets. Admirably done is the whole of this encounter. Lady Coryston proposes to settle the whole estate—some seventy thousand a year—upon her younger son, the Tory member, buying off Lord Coryston by an immediate gift equal to a tithe of what would have been his. Coryston refuses. It must be all or nothing. Either he will have all the property which would naturally have come to him, or none of it. But in either case he proposes to manage it; he will settle on the estate and " try to drum a few sound ideas into the minds of our farmers and labourers." He will declare war, in short, not only on his mother's party in general, but upon his mother herself within her own kingdom. Lady Coryston

accepts the challenge, but she soon finds that the battle is to be more serious than she reckoned. Her agent—her pearl of agents—comes to her with the news that Lord Coryston has taken up, in Lady Coryston's own village, the quarrel of the Baptists, to whom she has refused ground for a chapel because their minister holds Radical opinions. Obviously this was a good stick for an agitator to get hold of, and the agent asks whether his employer adheres to her refusal. She, of course, is not to be intimidated.

"The agent's mind let loose a thought to the effect that the increasing influence of women in politics did not seem likely to lead to peaceful living. His long experience of Lady Coryston, able as she was, and as he admitted her to be in many respects, had in the end only increased in him a secret contempt for women inbred in all but a minority of men. They seemed to him to have so little power of playing the game—the old game of success that men understand so well: through compromise, cunning, give and take, shrewd and prudent dealing."

The agent's view is not precisely that of Mrs Ward, but she appears to lean to the opinion that if women step outside their own sphere they do lack reasonableness and the power of adjustment—which is another name for the art of compromise. Lady Coryston's troubles are only beginning when she quarrels with her eldest son. Her youngest, the promising Tory, has fallen in love with a daughter of the Philistines—with a daughter, indeed, of the Chancellor of the Exchequer (so near does Mrs Ward go in her presentment of the situation) " the most vigorously hated and ardently followed man of the moment." Here, however, the resemblance stops: the Glenwilliam of the book does not in any degree resemble Mr Lloyd George. The daughter, his comrade and champion, is a personality in her own right; and we are given to understand that one reason why Enid Glenwilliam wishes to have Arthur Coryston at her feet is because Lady Coryston has been publicly rude to her father. The approach of Nemesis is unsuspected by its victim: Mrs Ward makes us

feel that Lady Coryston is too busy with political campaigning to keep in touch with the lesser fortunes of her own family. When her daughter becomes engaged she insists that the "marriage shall be over in good time to leave people free for the General Election"; and in all this there is no hint of caricature: Lady Coryston is perfectly credible—the domineering woman whose will has flung itself into a particular activity at a moment of great crisis. But her daughter, used to one tyranny, begins to find herself menaced by another far more intimate and formidable. Marcia's lover is the heir of rich and devout people, model landlords, who wish that their villages shall be model villages. The punishment for offence against the moral law is expulsion; and it appears that a chief servant of the Newburys has transgressed. He has married a divorced woman—to devout Anglican Catholics no marriage at all. With perfect sincerity of conviction his employers, the lords territorial of the village, declare that to him also the law must apply. It matters

nothing that his conscience as well as his heart justifies what he has done—that the marriage has been an act, not only of love, but of wise Christian charity. The Newbury family will not consent to connive, however obscurely, at such a compromise, or at such a recantation; and Marcia, who, through the agency of her brother Coryston, is dragged into the affair, finds herself face to face (like Laura in *Helbeck*) with a spiritual law to which she cannot reconcile her soul. She, too, like Laura, feels the fascination of her lover's absolute mystical faith, feels the desire to submit, but, again like Laura, cannot bring herself to it. Less tragically, no doubt, she too revolts against tyranny, the invasion of her conscience in its stronghold: and, with a fine touch of irony, Mrs Ward indicates that Lady Coryston does not disapprove her daughter's revolt. Tyranny of this sort, based on a mystical idea, offends the great lady's strong common-sense. Her own fight, which she wages by similar methods, is a political battle for the traditional rights

and privileges of her own class. The crisis of the book comes when Lady Coryston is faced with her son Arthur's apostasy. Very characteristically her lifelong habit of domination brushes aside the young man's avowal of his desire to marry Glenwilliam's daughter; she takes the matter into her own hands at once, and goes off to interview the girl.

The scene that follows is one of the best that Mrs Ward has ever written. Lady Coryston's utter discomfiture—predicted by her rebel eldest son—does not deprive her of dignity; and the lapse into a human confession of sorrow, which softens her opponent at the finish, is admirably put in. What finally weakens the fierce woman—for she cannot bend—is the angry revolt of her favourite, Arthur, who shows up meanly in his anger: it is Coryston the rebel who has most understanding of his mother, and, in the end, most power to reconcile what is left of her to defeat.

The study of this very curious and interesting masculine type makes one feel that

Mrs Ward has been thinking; for the characterisation of Lord Coryston has insight as well as wit; it recognises the value of the inborn Radical.

"He was one of the mercurial men who exist to keep the human tide in movement. Their opinions matter principally because without them the opinions of other men would not exist. Their function is to provoke, and from the time he was a babe in the nursery Coryston had fulfilled it to perfection."

The opinions which Lord Coryston seeks to advance are hostile to the existence of landlord power. He is an enemy of despotism in all its forms—whether the motive be a desire to enforce a Churchman's honest creed as to the marriage of divorced persons, or a purely political conservatism; or again, the mere oppressive cruelty of a petty Liberal tradesman who exercises harshly his right of property to evict. One is almost inclined to believe that Mrs Ward is less convinced than before of the rights which

property confers; and at least it is certain that she regards the Lady Corystons of this world and their allies as defending a hopeless position. She anticipates, that is, defeat for the side which has most of her sympathies.

"How much longer will this rich, leisurely and aristocratic class, with all its still surviving power and privilege, exist among us? It is something that is obviously in process of transmutation and decay, though in a country like England the process will be a very slow one. Personally I greatly prefer this landlord stratum to the top stratum of the trading and manufacturing world. There are buried seeds in it, often of rare and splendid kinds, which only crisis brings to life, as in the Boer War. And the keen cult of family and inheritance implies, after all, something valuable in a world that has lately grown so poor in cults."

So moralises one of the minor characters in this novel who is cast for the part of an intelligent looker-on. This forecast, taken in connection with the rest of the book, has an interest because it bears on the only

occasion when Mrs Ward, so far as the world knows, took a definite part in politics. At the General Election of December, 1910, she published a pamphlet called *Letters to My Neighbours on the Present Election*, dealing with the main issue of that election—the continuance or limitation of the powers and privileges possessed by the " rich, leisurely and aristocratic class." In supporting the continuance of these things she based her argument largely on the good which English landlords had done—on the superiority of the " closed " village, belonging to a great landed estate, over the " open " village, where the houses belong to small owners. Incidentally the pamphlet reveals that as part of her studies for *Marcella* she read through the Agricultural Reports of the Grand Commission on Labour—a fact very typical of her methods as a novelist. But the point to observe is that, whereasin *Marcella* and other books we have much about the evils that grow up under a bad landlord, here in *The Coryston Family* there is a strong suggestion of the tyranny which

may be exercised, from the most conscientious motives, on a well-managed estate.

Partly, one may suppose that Mrs Ward, concerned to interpret the England of her day, has been confronted with the fact that the election of 1910 went strongly against her view: that there was no mistaking the widespread dislike in England for these hereditary powers. Asking herself the reason, she has found it in the action of bad landlords, condemned by their own class, such as she depicts again in *The Mating of Lydia*. But, with characteristic fairness, she sees that the objection goes farther, and so we have her recognition that such conscientious tyranny as the Newburys' is possible, and even probable. To this she links on a new proposition—a thesis set out *in terrorem* —which can be plainly traced to the working of her mind on a burning political question. Woman's agitation for political equality has brought Mrs Ward into the political arena as a speaker and writer strongly opposed to woman's political claim; and this novel points to a recognition by her of a want of

logic in the position of many women who oppose women's suffrage. Mrs Ward sees that politicians who encourage women to organise themselves for political purposes, whether in the Primrose League or in similar associations, cannot consistently resist the plea that women should be allowed to vote. The conclusion, very unmistakably put in *The Coryston Family*, is that her sex should keep out of politics altogether; that they spoil themselves, and spoil political life, by deserting their true place. Coryston, the Radical, is made to say:

"But the women—oughtn't they to be in the shrine, tending the mystic fire? What if the fire goes out—if the heart of the nation dies?"

Lady Coryston loses touch with her children, loses their confidence and their affection, because she throws herself into the "dusty business" of politics, with a vehemence beyond that of men. Good men have often been tyrants at the bidding of a creed. Mrs Ward sets up Lady Coryston as

an awful example to show that, because "women are so unmeasured," they will act from a political creed as men have acted under the ardent stimulus of religion; and that there will be more tyranny instead of less, and consequently more peril to the landlord class.

It is unnecessary and it would be scarcely critical to pursue farther the review of Mrs Ward's writings. She has published several books since the war, and they do her no justice. One, *Lady Connie*, an affectionate attempt to revive the Oxford of her young life, is not better than *Miss Bretherton*. The lack of concentration, natural in time of war with a novelist who is so much a citizen, has affected not only her creative power but her normal and very capable technique. Yet at her best her technique has never been more than competent. Her writing, good as it is, lacks personality. It would be hard to swear to a page of Mrs Ward. I do not know but the same holds of George Eliot —the novelist whom she most resembles— but the comparison is not fair. Everybody

knows that George Eliot had humour and had passion, superadded to the mental attainments which she shares with Mrs Ward. What discriminates her from Mrs Ward is what places her among the immortals. To try a more adequate comparison, Mrs Oliphant too had humour, and also had charm; yet I think that Mrs Ward's intellectual range, her real grip of struggles that involve the intellect, go far to compensate for her lack of those graces. And while Mrs Oliphant, poor soul! wrote her fingers literally to the bone, pouring out copy with undiscriminating profusion, Mrs Ward has been the careful stewardess of her own talent; she has evidently laboured to make each book complete to the utmost of her ability. She seems to have everything that can be acquired by study—including the technical accomplishment of bringing singularly untractable matter into a story. I fear that the qualities which she lacks are qualities necessary to survival—the salt of humour, the fire of passion, the personal charm of a style.

Yet in any review of our period in literature Mrs Ward's name must always occupy considerable space. Future criticism will not overlook the fact that she almost alone of her contemporaries avoided dealing in the crudities of passion and won her popularity by a singularly austere appeal; addressing herself not to the senses or the simpler feelings, but to those emotions which connect themselves with high and often abstract intellectual interests. There is no mistaking her honest and well-nourished public spirit, no ignoring her services as a good citizen. Yet, while a book like *Beauchamp's Career* braces the tone of those who read, and puts life into the ideals of good citizenship, Meredith makes these effects, as it were, unconsciously and by the mere contagion of his presence. He writes for the sake of embodying a number of characters working themselves out in mutual relations; and his creative impulse is the artist's pure and simple. I am sure Mrs Ward enjoys writing her novels. But the pleasure which I feel in them and behind them is the publicist's

who has discovered a subtle device through which argument can be conducted under special forms. She fails, I think, in the last resort, not because she is too much of the good citizen, but because she is too little of an artist. She would sooner found an influential sect than write a supremely good book. This is a perfectly natural ambition, but one incompatible with the highest literary success.

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